

REMARKS

Reconsideration of this application, as amended, is requested.

Claims 1-3 and 5-17 remain in the application. Claim 4 has been canceled. Each of the remaining claims has been amended to eliminate the numeric references. Numeric references are not required under US patent law and are given no patentable weight. Accordingly, the amendment to eliminate the numeric references is not a narrowing amendment and is not an amendment entered for purposes of patentability. Claim 1 also has been amended to incorporate the limitations of canceled claim 4. Independent claim 11 has been amended to define the invention more clearly.

Claims 1-4 were rejected under 35 USC 102(b) as being anticipated by Betsui. The Examiner asserted that Betsui has a housing 10 and a separate front member 51 insertable into the receptacle 13 of the housing 10. The Examiner also asserted that Betsui has guiding means 19, 63, 69 and 23 between the front member and the receptacle for guiding the front member into the receptacle substantially parallel with the connecting direction.

The structure that the Examiner compares to the claimed guiding means actually are locking structures for locking the Betsui latching member 50 in the housing. In particular, the resiliently deflectable locking members 19 and 69 will engage locking structures 23 and 63 to generate the deflection of the resiliently deflectable members 19 and 69. Sufficient insertion of the Betsui latching member 50 will cause the resiliently deflectable members 19 and 69 to pass the nondeflectable locking structure 23 and 63. Hence, the resiliently deflectable members 19 and 69 will return to their undeflected

condition to achieve a locked engagement of the Betsui latching member 50 in the housing 10.

The applicants herein have determined that the forces created by the engagement of a resiliently deflectable locking structure and a locking projection will cause a movable member to tilt relative to the inserting direction. This tilting causes the movable member to bind in the receptacle and prevents a smooth insertion of the movable member into the receptacle. This aspect of the invention of the invention is described, for example, in paragraph 0060 where the applicants explain that “the engagement of the guide ribs 45, 46 and the guide grooves 51, 52 prevents the moving plate 40 from tilting when the locking piece 47 engages the partial locking projections 54.” The only engaging structures shown by Betsui are the locking structures that will generate the tilt of the latching member 50. There is nothing in Betsui to suggest the claimed guiding means between the front member and the receptacle spaced from the resiliently deflectable locks and the locking projections. A person skilled in this technology would not be motivated to provide the additional structures on Betsui without the benefit of hindsight gleaned from applicant’s disclosure. Accordingly, it is submitted that the invention defined by amendment claims 1-4 is not taught or suggested by Betsui.

Claims 1 and 5-17 were rejected under 35 USC 103(a) as being obvious over Suzuki considered in view of Iwahori. The Examiner asserted that Suzuki shows a housing 10 and a separate front member 20 that is insertable along an inserting direction into the receptacle of the housing 10. The Examiner provided an annotated copy of portions of FIG. 1 of Suzuki to identify parts of the Suzuki reference that were

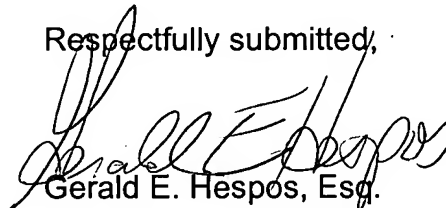
considered by the Examiner to be the equivalents of the claimed guiding means. In particular, the Examiner considers the element 25 on the Suzuki holder 20 to be the equivalent of one of the claimed guiding means. The Examiner then considered the channel on the housing 10 that receives the locking arm 25 to be the equivalent of the other of the opposed guiding means. The Examiner admitted that Suzuki does not show the claimed cavities. However, the Examiner turned to Iwahori to show a connector with cavities. The Examiner concluded that it would be obvious to provide the cavities of Iwahori in the housing of Suzuki and that the hypothetical combination would suggest the invention defined by claim 1. With respect to claim 7, the Examiner concluded that the mating connector 60 of Suzuki has a shake preventing portion 64 that becomes active towards the end of the insertion stroke of the mating housing into the receptacle.

Suzuki has a holder 20 with a cantilevered arm 25 provided with locking structures thereon. The cantilevered arm 25 of Suzuki is structurally and functionally very similar to the locking piece 47 disclosed in the subject application. However, as explained above, the engagement of the cantilevered arm 25 of Suzuki with corresponding locking structure on the housing would cause the holder 20 of Suzuki to tilt during insertion into the housing. Such tilting can cause the holder to bind and can complicate the insertion of the holder into the housing. Additionally, extreme tilting of the holder 20 due to resistance created by the cantilevered arm 25 against the locking structures 15e, 15f on the housing can cause the holder to deform the tabs of the male terminal fitting.

In contrast to Suzuki and Iwahori, the invention defined by amended independent claims 1 and 11 has a plurality of pairs of ribs and grooves spaced from the resilient lock and the locking projection of the front member and housing for guiding the front member into the receptacle substantially parallel with the connecting direction. The ribs and the grooves in each pair have cross sections different from the ribs and the grooves in the other of the pairs. As a result, the claimed guiding means enable insertion of the front member into the receptacle parallel with the connecting direction, thereby preventing damage to the tabs of male terminal fittings in the housing. Additionally, the claimed differences of the grooves and ribs in the respective pairs prevents an inverted insertion of the moving member into the receptacle, thereby further preventing damage to the tabs. No combination of Suzuki and Iwahori suggests this aspect of the invention.

In view of the preceding amendments and remarks, it is submitted that the claims remaining in the application are directed to patentable subject matter. The Examiner is urged to contact applicant's attorney at the number below to expedite the prosecution of this application.

Respectfully submitted,



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